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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1659
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5853
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1983
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BANGKOK 002555

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#) [BM](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER; VIKTOR
BOUT, MAP THA PHUT CASES RAISED

REF: A. BANGKOK 2539 (PATH FORWARD ON CONSTITUTION)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2455 (AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH ADVISOR)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2402 (AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PUEA THAI
LEADER)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 2125 (POLICE CHIEF BATTLE)

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR ERIC G. JOHN, REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On October 6, the Ambassador met with Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban to discuss the latest political developments in Thailand, including Secretary General Niphon Promphan's recent resignation. Suthep characterized the resignation decision as hard to explain and expressed a reluctance to expand on an issue with clear connections to the Crown Prince (Note: In a separate conversation on October 5 with former Bangkok Governor and Abhisit ally Apirak Kosayodhin, Apirak told the Ambassador the resignation was not as serious for the Democrat party as some have suggested. End Note.) On a related issue, Suthep suggested the prolonged public battle over the Police Chief position would come to a close and the resulting political fallout contained within the next few months (REF D). Suthep told the Ambassador that former PM Thaksin retained c:yGt1^QuUU_Q problems. Suthep believed the plaE4xQ[Z\$t!QQnterfere with the courts, the RTG would do everything possible to ensure the appeals process ran smoothly and abided by the letter of the law.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: Deputy Prime Minister Suthep has long had the unenviable task of serving as the middle man between Prime Minister Abhisit on one hand, and the Democrat party's coalition partners on the other. Just as critically, Suthep has also been responsible for healing wounds and balancing interests within the Democrat party. Given those two mandates, the Police Chief controversy was in many ways

Suthep's worst nightmare, pitting the PM and symbolic head of the Democrat party simultaneously against the Democrat's most important coalition partner (Phumjai Thai) and the Crown Prince (represented by Secretary General and Deputy party leader Niphon Promphan). Not surprisingly, Suthep was reluctant to comment on his role in navigating this political minefield, but when the Ambassador probed him on the topic, his silence and uncomfortable body language spoke volumes.

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It was obvious that from Suthep's perspective, Prime Minister Abhisit had made his stand on the Police Chief issue and now, for better or for worse, Suthep would be charged with picking up the pieces. End Summary and Comment.

POLICE CHIEF BATTLE

14. (C) The Ambassador began the meeting by asking Suthep about Niphon Promphan's resignation last week as Secretary-General for Prime Minister Abhisit (Note: As outlined in REF B, Niphon is a trusted advisor of Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn and is widely believed to have resigned because of complications related to his advocacy of Prince Vajiralongkorn's candidate -- Police General Jumpol Manmai -- over PM Abhisit's choice of Police General Prateep. End Note.) Suthep characterized the resignation decision as difficult to explain and avoided any direct mention of Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn's involvement in the matter. Hinting at the sensitivities associated with the entire Police Chief imbroglio and Niphon's subsequent resignation, Suthep offered simply that he was prepared to work with anyone and implied the issue was emblematic of deep rifts across the political spectrum. The Police Chief issue -- as well as the attendant political fallout associated with PM Abhisit's dogged support for Police General Prateep -- would take a few months to solve, but Suthep would work to resolve any problems.

15. (C) On October 5, in a separate conversation with former Bangkok Governor and PM Abhisit stalwart Apirak Kosayodhin, the Ambassador asked about the implications of Niphon's resignation for the Democrat party. Apirat cheerfully told the Ambassador the issue was not nearly as grave as had been implied by the media, and that Niphon's resignation had not seriously impacted party operations or morale.

THAKSIN

16. (C) Turning to former PM Thaksin Shinawatra, Suthep said that Thaksin's proxies in Bangkok, including his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, were still actively trying to pave the way for his return to Thailand. Suthep did not see a viable path forward for his return at this point, however, and noted that Thaksin's goal of getting all of his money back and not serving a day in jail was unrealistic. As a fugitive, Thaksin's most serious problems were legal and he would have to work on resolving them through judicial channels. Suthep believed Thaksin viewed himself as above the law. Another complicating factor was that many Thai citizens were also deeply skeptical of Thaksin's political intentions, and concerned that his return could damage the monarchy.

PUEA THAI

17. (C) On the subject of Thaksin's political vehicle Puea Thai, the Ambassador asked for Suthep's assessment of former PM GEN Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's decision to join the party. Suthep said that he had given up trying to understand Chavalit's decision making process a long time ago. Chavalit had served as Prime Minister at one point, and then later accepted a job as Deputy Prime Minister, a development he characterized as unprecedented in Thai politics.

18. (C) Suthep agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that

Puea Thai lacked viable candidates to serve as the public face for the party, and from that perspective, Puea Thai's recruitment of Chavalit made sense. Suthep did not believe, however, that Chavalit would have any success serving as a mediator and attempting to bridge Thailand's political divide. Suthep told the Ambassador that Chavalit was

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involved with the violence associated with the May 1992 protests known as "Black May." Chavalit was also involved with the October 7, 2008 crackdown on "yellow-shirt" protestors and therefore had very little credibility to serve as a go-between.

RED-SHIRT RALLIES

19. (C) The Ambassador asked Suthep about the anti-government United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), aka the "red-shirts," and their plan to hold another protest in Bangkok on October 17, as well as the potential for protests in conjunction with the Asean Summit in Hua Hin from October 23-25. Suthep said that he was worried about the potential for trouble on both occasions, but underscored the fact that the RTG had learned its lesson from the violence that shook Pattaya and Bangkok earlier this year. Suthep told the Ambassador that in a cabinet meeting later in the day, he would propose invoking the Internal Security Act (ISA) for both events. In Bangkok, the ISA would apply only to the area surrounding the planned protest (Dusit district), while in Hua Hin the ISA would only affect select conference locations. In both instances, the ISA would allow the military to deploy troops and coordinate with law enforcement authorities in order to maintain the peace. Suthep said that the government had learned the hard way that many police officers were red-shirt sympathizers and could not always be trusted to carry out RTG commands.

THE CONSTITUTION

10. (C) Turning to the government coalition's recent decision to move forward with six amendments to the Constitution (REF A), Suthep described the process from this point on as relatively straight forward. According to Suthep, the coalition government had agreed to abide by the six proposed recommended amendments forwarded by the Reconciliation Committee for Political Reform and Constitutional Amendments. Suthep said the government would not entertain Puea Thai's proposal to put the 1997 and 2007 Constitutions side by side in a public vote, but would instead hold a referendum which would allow Thai voters to approve or disapprove of each of the six proposed amendments on an individual basis. While this approach would probably be opposed by both the red and yellow shirts for different reasons, in Suthep's view, a referendum along those lines made the most sense moving forward.

11. (C) When the Ambassador asked Suthep how long he thought the entire constitutional revision process might take from start to finish, Suthep suggested it could be wrapped up in nine to 12 months. At the end of that process the government could then call for new elections. That said, Suthep cautioned that if the political cleavages that were currently hampering the Thai political process were not satisfactorily addressed before that point, the government might be forced to delay elections until a later date. The government would have to make sure the country was ready for peaceful elections.

DOW CHEMICAL

12. (C) The Ambassador expressed his concern with the impact of a recent Central Administrative Court environmental ruling which suspended all projects and activities in the Map Ta

Phut Industrial Estate area. The Court's decision grouped Dow Chemical -- which had environmental standards that exceeded those mandated by the RTG -- together with other firms who had much more lax standards. The Ambassador noted

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that the decision jeopardized Dow's three billion dollar investment in Map Ta Phut, including expansion plans now underway. Several thousand Thai employees were involved with expansion plans alone and their future was now uncertain. Dow was also re-evaluating its investment in Thailand and the Court's decision had implications throughout the American investment community.

¶13. (C) Suthep said that the Prime Minister was surprised by the verdict and he noted that the RTG had already appealed it. Given Dow's strong environmental credentials, in Suthep's view, the company should be allowed to proceed with its plans. Suthep also wished to see the issue resolved as a strong interest in the Viktor Bout case. Following up on the DCM's October 1 meeting with Suthep, the Ambassador reiterated USG concern with the fact that unbeknownst to the Office of the Attorney General's office, Bout and his lawyers had recently met with the appeals judge. The Ambassador noted that this lack of coordination and communication was troubling, and expressed his hope that the RTG would make every effort to ensure the appeals process abided by the letter of the law. The Bout appeal verdict would have strong implications for the bilateral relationship, and it was critical to ensure the appeal was decided exclusively on the merits of the case.

¶15. (C) Suthep said that he was surprised to learn that the appeals judge had met with Bout's counsel without notifying the OAG's office. Suthep vowed to look into the matter and to provide the Embassy with all the relevant facts. While the RTG could not intervene directly in a court matter, the RTG also hoped the case would be overturned on appeal and would make every effort to make sure the process stayed on track.

JOHN